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ABSTRACT

Several central concerns of Canadian multiculturalism: promotion of the principles of equality, individual acceptance, and understanding and respect for diversity are quite common to the social studies area in particular. The paper examines the quest to avoid emphases on human differences and instead to stress commonalities. This rethinking of human relations, social outlook, and ideas of personal self-esteem is probed, as well as classroom activities to foster effective positive self-images. The apparent causes for the lack of appreciation for cultural diversity is outlined from a historical perspective. Both the role of the educator in dealing with these facts and the search for alternative approaches to achieving cultural pluralism present many difficulties, but the renewed campaign of social science for a recognition of the predispositions universal to all forms of society provides a useful focus. Six recommendations to aid teachers in the theme of universalism are presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the educational implications of emphasizing universals and treating "differentness" in such a way that it will be practically and pedagogically operationalized as an essential ingredient in the completing process of the human family. A footnote section is included. (TRS)

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TAKING THE BAD OUT OF DIFFERENT: THE CASE FOR CULTURAL UNIVERSALS

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TAKING THE BAD OUT OF DIFFERENT: THE CASE FOR CULTURAL UNIVERSALS

Several decades ago the validity of the concept of cultural universals was under scrutiny by anthropologists, principally its utility as an explanation for the underlying unity of the human race. In 1940, George Murdock, for example, had argued that cross-cultural similarities are numerous and appear even more far-reaching when individual items in any such list are subjected to further analysis.[1] Murdock's partial list of 76 items included everything from age-grading, athletic sports and bodily adornment to eschatology, modesty concerning natural functions and weather control. He contended that true cultural universals are not identifiable in habit or definable in behavior because they are similarities in classification, not in content.

Critics of Murdock's theory have since claimed that the concept of cultural universals glosses over significant differences among varying patterns of life so as to diminish the importance of individual personality and choice. This criticism has held the limelight until recently, perhaps as a detriment by overemphasizing the importance of individual and group idiosyncrasies at the cost of cross-cultural bridge-building and the promotion of human understanding. Reversing the tables and re-examining the implications of cultural universals is therefore an appropriate strategy, partially to provide a balance for the two positions, but also to explore the fertility of what has come to be an emerging theme in multicultural education.

A central concern of multiculturalism is the promotion of the principles of equality, individual acceptance, understanding and respect for diversity, all of which are quite common to the social studies area in particular. The underlying assumption is that individual or group differences originating in cultural diversity or other sources are to be anticipated, acknowledged, and perceived as an essential component of identity and thus of the learning process. This recognition will involve an incorporation of cultural constituents in school ongoings although too often the resultant approach features add-on programs such as festive observances, foods, dances and other forms of information and/or entertainment. Occasionally, attempts are made to integrate multicultural themes into the total school atmosphere, resulting in less emphasis on external practices, focussing instead on the development of programs and exercises for cooperation and mutual appreciation.

School activities that accentuate individual and cultural differences at the expense of cultivating togetherness include affirmative action programs which may be interpreted as extensions of sympathy to the less able. This may happen despite the best efforts of the originators to avoid this emphasis, but the nature of these programs simply implies a kind of inequality that cannot be camouflaged. These programs inherently portend that teachers should compensate for the deficiencies of their students and treat them preferentially. Such treatment implies an inability to perform on par with "regular" students, and the differences which they exhibit suddenly become deficiencies.[2]

The quest to avoid an inordinate emphasis on human differences may involve an embarkment on a variety of avenues with the distinct possibility that no completely unbiased format will be discovered. A more fruitful approach may involve a reversing the emphasis to incorporate the positive tone of stressing commonalities. This decision may also bypass the allurement of seeking to camouflage individual eccentricities, even though this may not be as easily incepted as may first appear. It will not be easy, for example, to convince some individuals to abandon the notion that people are inherently different, regardless of the evidence that shows that many commonalities also persist. There are several reasons why this orientation may be difficult to alter, some of them worthy of further examination on the basis that such a direction may illuminate fruitful avenues by which to alleviate the current mistrust of the thesis of basic human similarities and to corroborate a new direction for pedagogical activities.

Adjusting Our Social Outlook

To begin, there is a prevailing belief that people are generally afraid of things they have little knowledge of - fear of the unknown. The current rates of technological and social change have obviously functioned to accelerate such fears because the resultant adjustments required leave little time for other kinds of considerations. Support for the observation about rapid change generally includes these kinds of facts: ninety percent of all scientific breakthroughs have been made in the 20th century; until mid-nineteenth century the speed of transportation never exceeded twenty miles per hour, and today astronauts travel at speed exceeding 20,000 miles an hour; and the number of scientific journals and articles is doubling every fifteen years with

an output in excess of 20 million pages per year.[3] More staggering are the prophetic utterances made by John Naisbitt in his bestselling Megatrends; he accentuates developments often taken for granted by the public and illustrates their implications for everyday social life. On Naisbitt's list are California's craze for natural (health) foods and Proposition 13, which gave ordinary people a say on taxation, and Colorado's sunset laws which limited the size of man-constructed phenomena such as freeways, shopping centres and airports. Connecticut liberalized a new appreciation for the sexes by electing the first woman governor. This state also led the way in allowing workers the right to know by arranging for them to have representation on company boards. Washington eliminated the compulsory retirement age of 65, the reverberations of which have not yet been fully settled, and Florida developed the concept of detachment to permanence (condo living) and the co-existence of two very different kinds of citizens, the retired and the beach crowd.[4]

The constant rethinking that is required to adjust to today's world leaves little room on the agenda to digest the findings of the social sciences pertaining to human relations. These disclosures often require new ways of looking at familiar phenomena like the concepts of democracy, equality, and freedom. They demand a fresh evaluation of cultural trappings because these often constitute a blanket that hinders observers from taking a deeper look at what it houses. Once removed, the nakedness that results comprises a universal binding of mankind into a single race, a family. This, for the fragile human creature beset with a myriad of tugging social forces, is often just one too many challenges. In an attempt at self-preservation the temptation

to recoil from new learnings may be overwhelming. Personal safeguards may be interpreted in terms of maintaining old ideas, thus avoiding the risk of having to make significant readjustments in outlook and interpretation.

The concept of self-esteem has become the subject of much increased attention in multiculturalism, often serving as a springboard for fruitful discussions of academic achievement and social adjustment. In order for children to learn, the discussants contend they must perceive themselves as competent human beings who can succeed at the tasks which they undertake. A major goal for education, therefore, is to help children develop positive self-images, to see themselves as worthwhile human beings and thus do better work.[5] A related claim is that teachers who posit favorable images of themselves affect those which their students develop, and thus the process develops a kind of cyclical format.

Outlooks that people have toward others may be similarly affected by the self-images they hold. If these are negative, the chances that someone else will come off well in their evaluations are slight. Attitudes, achievement and social orientations are all affected by this processes, and thus the building of positive self-images is not only of concern to multicultural contexts, it is a primary concern for all education. It may be hard enough to envisage a satisfactory adjustment to our rapidly changing world, but that task will best be accomplished in the context of having developed an adequate self-concept.

Classroom activities designed to foster positive self-images are effective only when their implementation is accompanied with a spirit of acceptance and openness. Participants should be encouraged to feel

welcome in any group atmosphere and be able to realize the conviction that their background and value system are acceptable. They should see themselves as being worthy of making a contribution to any process or project and dare to try new things with the expectation of success. Even if they fall short of their own expectations, they should sense the assurance that it will still be possible and desirable to continue their efforts.

It is probably not too popular to suggest that child socialization that differs in any significant way from that of dominant society is "poor socialization", but that risk is taken by authors Altman and Grose who suggest that when that process alleviates against respect for the home and parents or against acceptable sex roles, or law and order, young people are likely to experience difficulty with regard to compliance with social norms.[6] The result is that the poorly socialized child quickly develops contravening type attitudes toward others, particularly toward those whose philosophies or lifestyles reflect a unique cultural flavor. There appears to be inherent in good socialization the ability to comprehend and appreciate a certain measure of diversity.

A fourth cause for the lack of appreciation for cultural diversity may emanate from a single negative experience involving someone belonging to a group that is held in disdain. In fact, reprehension toward others may originate rom a single incident, and become a basis for the development of a prevailing negative attitude. This kind of inductive thinking, unfortunately, is deeply imbedded in the Canadian way of life. The advertising world thrives on it and manages to project the versatility of a great variety of products on the basis that

their worth has been proven in a particular situation. Today's sophistication in decision-making mitigates against such a method, of course, since matters tend to be much more complicated than they first appear, but the attraction to this avenue is often appealing for personalities who appreciate quick solutions and easy answers. It may be difficult to amend such an outlook by direct instruction, but a series of positive depth experiences with the party or group about whom the negative stereotype is held may cause a shift in focus. These new experiences should be undertaken over some period of time, involve pleasant circumstances, feature indepth exchanges and, if possible, the performance of a mutual unthreatening task.[7]

Another possible explanation for the lack of appreciation for the family of man concept originates in Canadian history. Historians must surely be tempted at times to refrain from telling the story of some minority experiences in this country simply because of the negative events that leap to attention. Simply to dwell on the positive, however, is tantamount to relating a partial history, and that is surely an orientation which historians would not be likely to indulge in.

As examples of negativity in our history we might begin with the aboriginal peoples who a hundred years ago were given promises pertaining to land claims, hunting rights, etc. on the basis of "as long as the rivers run and the grass grows." The fulfillment of those rights is still an agenda item with the Native peoples who have many times seen their lands sold without their consent, had their hunting rights revoked or their sacred burial grounds molested by oil crews seeking a passageway for a pipeline.[8]

As Mary Ashworth tells the story, the history of British Columbia has to stand as a most unfavorable example featuring a long list of atrocities inflicted on Canadian minorities. On the practical side there is little doubt that the educational and economic opportunities of groups such as Native peoples, Chinese, Japanese, Doukhobors and East Indians were not only limited but inhibited in the Ashworth accounts.[9] Specific incidents include the treatment which the Japanese received during World War II at the hands of the Federal Government and the two most westerly provinces, or the negative attitude which prevailed toward the Chinese after the completion of the railway across the country in 1885. The Chinese were allowed to immigrate specifically for railway construction purposes and when that task was completed every effort was undertaken to stop more of them from entering the country and discouraging those who were here from fully integrating into the mainstream. The Japanese story highlights the unfortunate public opinion of the time that equal human liberties and human rights did not belong to people whose physical characteristics resembled those of the war enemy. Thus thousands of Japanese were imprisoned in work camps more toward the interior of the country and their holdings confiscated and sold to other Canadians.[10]

The Doukhobor story is probably less well-known than that of either the Chinese or the Japanese, although the offences against that people is about as severe. About 7,000 Doukhobors arrived in Canada in 1899 and took possession of reserved lands on the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border near Yorkton. Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, placed a few restrictions on the immigrants but it was later learned that governmental authorities would require individual

registration of their lands instead of approving the communal arrangement which the Doukhobors favored. By 1903 groups of new settlers lined up at the land registration office for an overnight stay to file for rights to the Doukhobor lands. These lands were then confiscated without remuneration, although Doukhobor farming efforts had turned prairie grass into fertile agricultural soil. In 1907 most of the Doukhobors had again set up a communal form of living in the Interior of British Columbia but their troubles were not over.[11] Provincial authorities suddenly decided that their children should be forced to attend public schools, and when the reactionary segment of the Doukhobor population decided against the move, their children were taken from them and incarcerated at the New Denver, B.C. townsite and the parents given restricted visitation privileges. The details of the story include the incarceration of 170 Sons of Freedom children from 1953-1959, allowing twice a month visits by parents with the only contact being through a wire fence. Again, the reader of these happenings may have to remind himself with some effort that "it happened in Canada". The sale of Doukhobor communal lands in 1937 through a government encouraged foreclosure is further evidence of Canadian "hospitality" experienced by Doukhobors.

The frequently debated Manitoba School Question of 1890 brings to light the fact that even one of the founding nations, the French, could suffer the loss of their own school system and official recognition of their language. Only in 1985 would they see the return of the language right via a Supreme Court action that also demanded the translation of all Manitoba's provincial laws into both official languages of the nation. Less well known is the fact that the same Act of 1890

motivated the exodus to Mexico of 5,000 Mennonites whose schools had been closed by the same fell swoop of the law.[12]

Finally, there is the story of the condemned Jews of Auschwitz whose dream it was to settle in Canada, the land of life, luxury and salvation. But Canada was closed to the Jews, the reasons typified in the words of one anonymous Canadian official who summed up the nation's policy in that regard with the words, "None is too many!"[13]

What should the role of the educator be in dealing with these facts? Should they be ignored or glossed over? Should a search for positive incidents of majority-minority relations be undertaken and told with an extraordinary emphasis on the good nature of Canadians? The answer must be negative, for an abundance of such happenings could probably not be unearthed. Neither would the juxtaposing of positive and negative events necessarily do anything to change the opinions of those whose negativity is well entrenched in mind-set and behavior. An alternative approach would be to concentrate on the activities undertaken by minority groups in settling in Canada to establish a line of familiarity, or tracing their reactions to the atrocities heaped upon them. Items could include the Japanese readiness to assimilate into the mainstream, the forgiving attitude of the Chinese, the regrouping of the Doukhobor community after the dismantling of their communal form of life or the aboriginal peoples' penchant for endurance in the midst of social and legal oppression. As Joe Couture puts it, "Native culture has proven to be adaptive and dynamic, not static", and "Native cultures are inherently creative; they invent structural forms and institutions as needed."[14] Like other minorities, the will to prevail and to adapt will no doubt continue to be a fundamental feature of

Native cultures and will function as a source of encouragement to others.

The quest to achieve cultural pluralism in Canada will also be made more difficult in the immediate years ahead because of the Canadian penchant for self-analysis and criticism. Unlike our neighbors to the south whose strong sense of nationhood and patriotism is an internationally recognized trademark, Canadians tend to rain criticism on newly elected governments and build walls among the country's geographic regions, between west and east, and among linguistic groups. It is not necessarily so that a stronger sense of patriotism would be a cure for this ailment, but rather the development of a fuller appreciation for the basic stuff of which all peoples are composed. After all, we are all more nearly alike than different.

The Case for Cultural Universals

The renewed campaign of some social scientists for a recognition of the predispositions universal to all forms of society has a wide base. Primary to the various perspectives within the social sciences are the beliefs of liberalism which holds that all humans are members of a single species, and there are no biologically meaningful subspecies within it. "Races" are simply social constructs which correspond to no biological reality. Differences between human populations are smaller than those within them, and such differences as exist (e.g. I.Q. test performances) are largely if not entirely the product of the social environment. Racism and ethnocentrism are irrational, dysfunctional attitudes, if not downright aberrations of the human order to which rigid, authoritarian types are especially prone. Often the

rehabilitation of these attitudes will require forms of social therapy or carefully arranged social contact with members of a scorned group.[15]

Those who place stock in the efficacy of natural law will rally to the suggestion that all humans have inalienable rights and responsibilities. They will likely also contend that all humans live in communities governed by natural law and civil law, but recognize that civil law is subordinate to natural law. Also, disobedience of civil laws that violate natural laws is universally viewed at both a right and a responsibility. In application, the classroom becomes the laboratory in which these principles are operationalized, and their ground is inclusive of universal recognition.[16]

Additional support for the universalist contention is forthcoming from history, anthropology, sociology and psychology. For example, when historians study the period in Canadian history known as that of European immigration and the struggle for bilingualism (1890-1917), they often outline the common steps of settlement, i.e. making a living, establishing home life, social adjustment, geographic selection as to final place of abode (city, small town or country), and assimilative challenges pertaining to language and religious retention and endogamy. Anthropologists like Clark Wissler have also posited universals, namely, language and stock, artifacts (physical objects), social organization, government or leadership arrangements, underlying religious or belief systems, forms of welfare provisions for the aged, sick or needy, arts and music, forms of property ownership or usage, and education of the young to assure perpetuation of the system.[17] The sociological perspective is similar; according to an outline formulated by Charles Loomis, the social basics common to all humans

include knowledge and belief, sentiment or feeling, goals and objectives, norms, status-role, rank, power, sanctions and facilities.[18] Finally, a more individualistic series of now familiar commonalities is offered by psychologist Abraham Maslow, namely, physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness, love needs, self-esteem needs and self-actualization needs.[19]

A new importance to the theme of universalism emerges from the above discussion because of the unanimity of observations about cultural universals among social scientists. With this kind of affirmation it remains merely to draw out the educational implications of what must surely constitute the basis for a new approach to multicultural education. Instead of teaching about cultural differences and eccentricities it will be possible to illustrate varying cultural approaches to the essential basics of human social functioning. It is true that there will remain for many years on the Canadian scene a myriad of cultural variations with regard to such components as family life and economy, but the basic stuff of what it means to be part of the universal family of man will quickly suppress any extraordinary emphasis on particular eccentricities. Perhaps the essence of what it means to be Canadian will take new shape in light of this orientation. Toward that purpose, the recommendations of John Kehoe of the University of British Columbia are helpful. He suggests that teachers:

1. emphasize the positive achievements of minority groups rather than their hardships or persecution experiences;

2. emphasize similarities rather than exotic or bizarre differences;

3. present information from an insider's point of view using the "we" rather than the "they" kind of pronoun;

4. avoid emphasizing the material poverty of a region because doing so would risk raising undue sympathy;

5. allow students to examine the effect ethnocentrism and stereotyping can have on its victims. (Kehoe has also suggested that incidents pertaining to racism should be utilized as learning experiences to help students discover how they arrived at their opinions rather than simply telling them that their ideas or behavior are in error); and

6. Emphasize family life and everyday activities.[20]

Toward a New Mandate

The entrenchment of the universals concept has far-reaching implications for educational practice in terms of curriculum, methodology and individual appropriation. Curriculum revisions can perhaps be tackled first, although the process is quite complicated. An immediate and valid concern pertains to the matter of the generalizing data in the interests of portraying international fraternity. What happens to real differences of opinion and adversarial confrontation, the kind that enlarge to cause wars between/among nations? Will they be glossed over? And what of studying acts of atrocity that did happen; will they be ignored? The response must be one of assurance for the accuracy of history. What is also at stake, however, is the manner in which such data are handled, i.e. what kinds of implications and conclusions are drawn that may affect student behavior? If he or she agrees with the gist or a particular negative happening, how is the justification for such a stance formulated? Are there indeed grounds

for the continued maintenance of a subjugating attitude toward certain peoples? A study of the phenomenon of position-taking in order to determine the grounds for each stance may be a much more fruitful teaching avenue than merely to emphasize human universals per se. Both can be presented simultaneously, the one for the benefit of practicing analysis and the other as a means of formulating a positive tone for general school functioning.

Establishing a positive classroom atmosphere is as important as the content studied. The result is that more positive self-images can result which will affect the way in which subject matter is approached. As the varying cultural configurations in Canada or in the world are studied, individual students from those backgrounds may conceptualize their personal history in a more appreciating way. Even those whose backgrounds are not specifically analyzed may be able to generalize from the process to the extent of sensing a renewed worth of their personal identity and capabilities. When that is accomplished, "different" will no longer have any negative connotations; it will be practically and pedagogically operationalized as an essential ingredient in the completing process of the family of man.

FOOTNOTES

[1]George P. Murdock, "Universals of Culture", in Readings in Anthropology, edited by E. Adamson Hoebel, et.al., Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1955, 4-5.

[2]Ricardo L. Garcia, Teaching in a Pluralistic Society, New York: Harper and Row, 1982, 97.

[3]George Henderson, "Peace: Today and Tomorrow", in Education for Peace: Focus on Mankind, Washington, D.C.: ASCD Committee, 1973, 190-191.

[4]John Naisbett, Megatrends: Ten Directions Transforming Our Lives, New York: Warner, 1984.

[5]Pamela L. Tiedt and Iris M. Tiedt, Multicultural Teaching: A Handbook of Activities, Information and Resources, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1979, 24.

[6]Hal Altman and Kay Grose, The Teacher and the Troublemaker, Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1982, 42.

[7]M. Ahmed Ijaz, "Can We Change Our Students' Racial Attitudes?" Orbit, February 1982, 19-21.

[8]John W. Friesen, People, Culture and Learning, Calgary: Detselig, 1927, 127.

[9]Mary Ashworth, The Forces Which Shaped Them: A History of the Education of Minority Group Children in British Columbia, Vancouver: New Star Books, 1979.

[10]See The Enemy That Never Was by Ken Adachi, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart in association with the Multiculturalism Program, Department of the Secretary of State, 1976; and Ann Gomer Sunhara, The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War, Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981.

[11]See chapter four, "The School as a Cultural Wedge", in John W. Friesen, Schools With A Purpose, Calgary: Detselig, 1983.

[12]John W. Friesen, When Cultures Clash: Case Studies in Multiculturalism, Calgary: Detselig, 1985, 38-40.

[13]Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1983.

[14]Quoted in John W. Friesen, When Cultures Clash, 100-101.

[15]Pierre L. van den Berghe, The Ethnic Phenomenon, New York: Elsevier Science Publishers, 1981, 2-3.

[16]Ricardo L. Garcia, Teaching in a Pluralistic Society, 158.

[17]Clark Wissler, Man and Culture, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1923, quoted in John W. Friesen, Introduction to Teaching: A Sociocultural Approach, The University of Calgary Bookstore, 1984, 181-182.

[18]Charles Loomis, Social Systems: Essays on Their Persistence and Change, Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1960, quoted in Immigrant Group Settlements in Paraguay by Joseph Winfield Fretz, North Newton, Kansas: Bethel College, 1962, 109.

[19]George Henderson, "Peace: Today and Tomorrow", 188.

[20]Quoted in Michael Roe, Multiculturalism, Racism and the Classroom: A CEA Report, Toronto: Canadian Education Association, 1982, 38.